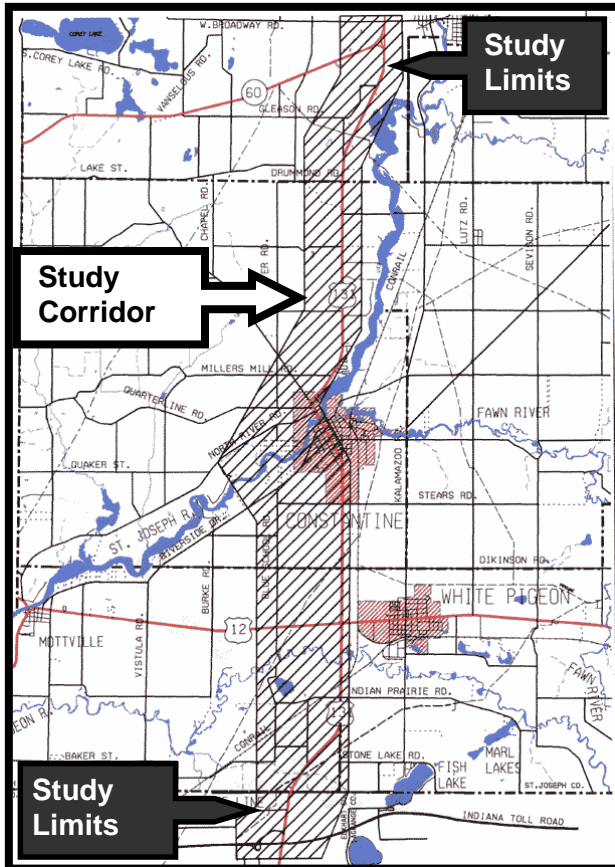


US-131 Improvement Study

From the Indiana Toll Road to M-60 in
St. Joseph County, Michigan and Elkhart County, Indiana



Public Information Meeting # 1

Thursday June 15, 2000

3:30 to 5:00 P.M. and 7:00 to 8:30 P.M.

Constantine High School Cafeteria

260 West Sixth Street

Constantine, Michigan

Welcome to the first US-131 Improvement Study public information meeting. The intent of this meeting is to obtain your comments, thoughts, and ideas as they pertain to the initial transportation improvements developed to date by the Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT) Planning Team.

Today's meetings will utilize an "open forum" format, which means you have the opportunity to speak one on one with members of the US-131 Planning Team at separate exhibit stations located around the room regarding environmental, traffic, and engineering issues. Each exhibit is stationed by a member of the US-131 Planning Team who will be eager to answer any questions you may have regarding the study or exhibits. No formal presentation will be made at this meeting. If you have any questions or additional comments not addressed by an exhibit, please do not hesitate to speak with any member of the Planning Team. Team members will be wearing name tags and will be happy to assist you.

Written Comments: You are encouraged to complete a project comment form and deposit it into the "Comment Buckets" located at each of the cafeteria exits. All written comments will be documented as part of the project's master file and taken into account as a part of the development and analysis of alternatives. Written Comments can also be submitted to the address shown on the back cover of this brochure.



STUDY AREA

The focus of the US-131 Improvement Study is on those portions of US-131 located in St. Joseph County, Michigan and Elkhart County, Indiana. The study area runs from the Indiana Toll Road located approximately 1/2 mile south of the Michigan/Indiana border, northerly to M-60, a distance of approximately 12 miles. The study area borders the communities of Constantine, White Pigeon, and Three Rivers.

Based on technical analysis and public comments received during the Michigan Department of Transportation's (MDOT) previous corridor location effort, a mile-wide corridor has been defined within which multiple transportation improvement alternatives will be analyzed. The study corridor is roughly bounded by US-131 to the east, Blue School and Schaffer Roads to the west, M-60 to the north, and the Indiana Toll Road to the south.

PROCESS

In accordance with federal and state laws and as required for all federal aided projects, MDOT is undertaking a planning effort to identify and study potential US-131 improvements between the Indiana Toll Road and M-60. Careful consideration will be given throughout the process to develop alternatives which minimize impacts to the natural and human environment while maximizing transportation benefits to the region and the traveling public. The end product of this study will be an Environmental Assessment (EA) or an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) prepared in accordance with the requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). This document will recommend a future course of action for improving travel between the Indiana Toll Road and M-60, in and around the Village of Constantine.

Throughout the course of this study the Planning Team will evaluate a variety of different types and locations of facility improvements with input from local stakeholders. As illustrated in **Figure 1**, a large number of initial "illustrative alternatives" are being evaluated by the US-131 Planning Team. As the study progresses through time, the alternatives will be refined and reduced in number through a staged process of progressively more involved analysis.

Since February 2000, the Planning Team with assistance from local stakeholders and regulatory agencies has identified and mapped known constraints within the study corridor which could preclude implementation of any given alternative. The information presented at the first public information meeting represents the initial concepts developed to date. Comments received will further assist in the refinement process.



Figure 1

Following this meeting, the US-131 Planning Team will further refine these illustrative alternatives based upon comments received from local stakeholders and the public in conjunction with further traffic, environmental, and engineering analysis. This analysis will include completing a detailed inventory of resources, conducting various field studies, and documenting proposed impacts within the environmental document.

Only those alternatives which are determined to be truly "practical" will be carried forward for further engineering and environmental analysis. A second public information meeting and a public hearing will be held following the practical alternatives development, where comments will again be requested regarding the alternatives. Ultimately a preferred alternative will be identified and selected based upon the extensive engineering and environmental analysis and public and agency comment received throughout the duration of the study.

PROJECT HISTORY

The following timeline provides an overview of the major events which helped establish the framework for the ongoing US-131 Improvement Study.

- 1991 - Congressman Fred Upton secures federal funding for study within the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act
- Dec. 1994 - Resolutions supporting improvements to US-131 are passed by the US-131 Area Development Association
- March 1995 - MDOT initiates Corridor Study Planning Activities

- November 1995 - Public Information Meetings are held in Schoolcraft and Constantine; over 350 attend.
- January 1996 – Local US-131 Master Plan Committee is organized. Purpose is to work cooperatively with MDOT in development of a Corridor Master Land Use Plan.
- November 1996 - Six planning corridors are presented to the Kalamazoo MPO and US-131 Corridor Master Planning Committee.
- December 1996 - MDOT Study Team recommends Corridor A as preferred corridor.
- November 1997 - Public Hearing is held in Three Rivers to present preferred Corridor A.
- January 2000 – MDOT adopts five year plan which includes US-131 Improvement Study to identify a preferred improvement type and location.
- February 2000 – US-131 Improvement Study begins.
- Regional commercial growth has been a catalyst for growing volumes of heavy truck traffic which now averages 14% of the average daily traffic.
- Seasonal tourism traffic is high due to the proximity of regional vacation destinations like Shipshewana and northern Michigan facilities.
- Traffic volumes have almost doubled in the last twenty years.
- The current roadway geometry including a 90° turn on US-131 within the Village of Constantine contributes to traffic congestion.

As a part of this study, extensive traffic analysis will continue to assist in the development of a long-term solution to the study area's growing traffic volumes and commercial congestion problems.

ALTERNATIVES UNDER CONSIDERATION

The federal NEPA process that the US-131 Planning Team is utilizing requires a hierarchy of analysis for a large number of potential transportation improvements. Emphasis will be given to maximizing the use of the existing US-131 right-of-way to the extent possible while minimizing impacts and accommodating traffic needs. In those areas where identified constraints preclude the implementation of an alternative along existing US-131, off-alignment alternatives will be examined. Alternatives to be assessed include but are not limited to:

- No action/No build (Do Nothing);
- Improving existing US-131 using Transportation System Management (TSM) improvements including potential passing relief lanes, turn lanes, signal and intersection improvements;
- Widening existing US-131; and
- Off-alignment alternatives as may be warranted by traffic, safety and environmental factors.

Multiple facility types will be examined for each of the aforementioned alternatives such as two or more lanes on existing or new alignments, a boulevard/divided highway, and a limited access facility (i.e. freeway). A combination of facility types will also be examined as appropriate to address differing conditions within the corridor.

PURPOSE AND NEED

US-131 provides Michigan with a very important north-south connection between Cadillac, Grand Rapids, Kalamazoo and the I-80/90 Toll Road in Indiana. The following are among the reasons for studying potential improvements to this segment of US-131.

- The study area includes the only two-lane segment of US-131 south of Cadillac, Michigan.
- An increase in congestion and heavy truck traffic exists due to the use of US-131 as a connector between I-94 and I-80/90.



SOCIAL, ECONOMIC, AND ENVIRONMENTAL (SEE) ANALYSIS

The Project Team with input from local stakeholders and regulatory agencies will identify potential social, economic and environmental impacts of the alternatives. This analysis will include completing a detailed inventory of resources, conducting various field studies, and documenting proposed impacts within the environmental document. Specific analysis and field work will include documenting impacts on/from.

- Land Use
- Farmland
- Social Factors
- Environmental Justice
- Economic Conditions
- Secondary Development
- Cumulative Impacts
- Parks and Recreational Land
- Relocations
- Air Quality
- Noise
- Water Quality
- Wetlands
- Wildlife
- Floodplains
- Threatened and Endangered Species
- Historic and Archeological Resources
- Visual Aesthetics
- Construction

THE NEXT STEPS

Comments from today's meetings will be used during the evaluation and refinement of illustrative alternatives. Following further technical analysis by the US-131 Planning Team and input from local stakeholders, a set of practical alternatives will be identified and will be brought back early in 2001 for additional public comments at a 2nd Public Information Meeting. Following the 2nd Public Information Meeting, comments will be summarized and an Environmental Assessment or Draft Environmental Impact Statement will be published. After a period of review, a public hearing will be conducted during the summer of 2001 to provide an opportunity for comment on the environmental document and to assist in the identification of a preferred alternative. Comments from the public hearing will be summarized and will be incorporated into the final environmental document.

ADDITIONAL PUBLIC INPUT OPPORTUNITIES

Multiple opportunities exist throughout the study process for public comment. Individuals with further questions, comments, or ideas can contact the following for additional study information.

Toll Free Project Number: MDOT's project consultant has established a toll-free phone number **(1-877-200-8638)** which can be called to obtain answers to specific property related questions and to receive project updates.

Web Site: A US-131 Improvement Study web site can be accessed on-line for additional project related information. The website address is **www.mdot.state.mi.us/US131StJoe**. The web site will be updated regularly with project related information. The web site also allows the public to submit questions or comments on-line directly to the US-131 Planning Team. Persons with questions specific to their properties are encouraged to call the Toll Free Hotline so that Team members can respond individually to your questions.

Written Comments: Written comments can be submitted to:

Michigan Department of Transportation

Mr. Paul Wisney, Project Manager
Mr. Jose Lopez, Public Hearings Officer
425 W. Ottawa Street
P.O. Box 30050
Lansing, MI 48909

Michigan Department of Transportation

Ms. Connie Morrison, Southwest Region Planner
1501 East Kilgore
Kalamazoo, MI 49001
(616) 337-3951

Consoer Townsend Envirodyne Engineers

Mr. Robert Thoma, Consultant Project Manager
822 Centennial Way, Suite 250
Lansing, MI 48917

Upcoming Activities Schedule

<i>Public Information Meeting # 1</i>	<i>June 15, 2000</i>
<i>Practical Alternatives Development</i>	<i>Fall 2000</i>
<i>Public Information Meeting # 2</i>	<i>Winter 2001</i>
<i>Draft Environmental Document</i>	<i>Summer 2001</i>
<i>Public Hearing</i>	<i>Summer 2001</i>
<i>Develop Preferred Alternative</i>	<i>Fall 2001</i>
<i>Final Environmental Document</i>	<i>Winter 2002</i>
<i>Study Completion</i>	<i>Spring 2002</i>